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ABSTRACT

This paper argues that social, political, and economic circumstances provide better explanations of rural school consolidation than the advertised curricular, pedagogical, or administrative benefits. Modern views of schooling over recent decades emphasize economic development and the need to improve international competitiveness. There is a distinction between "schools" (important places in which people construct a social reality) and "schooling" (an attempt at systematic instruction of knowledge). Historically, rural Americans valued schools as sites for community activities. Eventually, reformers took the communities out of schools and championed the "scientific" and "professional" views of schooling. Despite research advocating small schools and breakthroughs in distance learning, rural school closings continue. To explain the perpetuation of school closings, three theoretical interpretations suggest that an ideology of economic development and social progress influences both the organization of schooling and the predetermined purposes of instruction. First, the classical theories construe economic development as inherently benign. Second, in a "citizenship" perspective, schools become sites for the exercise of the legitimated authority of the state. A third set of theories includes predictable periods of crisis that compel the state to take extreme action. Changes in the political economy of West Virginia have led to recent crises in legitimation and subsequent school consolidations. (KS)

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THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RURAL SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION

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THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF RURAL SCHOOL CONSOLIDATION

Under the rubric of school "improvement," many places that once provided schooling no longer do; for they have been improved out of existence. The number of schools to which this technique has been applied is impressive, indeed. In 1930 there were 128,000 school districts and over 238,000 schools in America. By 1980, however, the number of school districts had dropped to 16,000 and schools to 61,000. Such consolidations, moreover, coincided with substantial enrollment increases earlier in this century (Stephens and Perry, 1991), and will probably continue in the future, regardless of projected enrollment growth (Gerald, Horn, & Hussar, 1989). As rural and small schools are typically the target of school consolidation, the threat of school closures persists as perhaps the most important concern in many American rural communities.

State-level policymakers and educational professionals typically spearhead efforts to consolidate rural schools as moves toward improving cost effectiveness or accountability. State Education Agencies (SEAs) influence the fate of rural schools, both directly and indirectly. They define and redefine not only appropriate school sizes, but desirable grade combinations as well; for example, most SEAs have adopted "the middle-school concept" in recent years. When SEAs impose on small local districts new standards that regulate size or grade combination, closures and consolidations are a predictable result. For most

educators, notions that smallness or local contexts may play vital roles in the educational process have been roundly ignored in our now century-old rush to create a "one best," metropolitan-inspired school system (Tyack, 1974; Sher, 1977).

Concerns of Modern Educators

In urban and suburban areas, mention of school today will probably center on shortcomings that relate to preparing children for the "information age." Such views reflect our contemporary preoccupation with America's presumed lack of "international competitiveness" (Kearns, 1987), but actually derive from older attempts to use schools to promote national purposes (Cremin, 1980; Meyer, Tyack, Nagel, & Gordon, 1979). Yet, representatives of metropolitan-based schooling and members of rural communities typically differ about the urgency of such matters (Dunne, 1983; Dunne and Carlsen, 1991).

For the last 40 years, modern views of schooling have increasingly advocated a view that children are "human resources" and useful as such for economic development (Schultz, 1981; Bowman, 1966). In the late 1950s and early 1960s, for instance the Soviet threat (symbolized by Sputnik), focused reform efforts in math and science. As a result, the nation "produced" far more engineers and scientists than it did philosophers or artists.

Despite a troubling modern heritage that views children as instruments of a global geopolitical contest, a philosophical debate over aims and processes of contemporary American school reform continues (e.g., Aronowitz & Giroux, 1985; DeYoung, 1989;

Howley, Pendarvis, & Howley, forthcoming; Spring, 1987). Many of today's critics, for example, observe that school reformers have issued few calls championing enhanced intellectual development per se. The current focus on so-called higher-order thinking skills illustrates this point: Advocates of this position suggest that the aim of schooling should be production of American workers who "think smarter" in terms of better "problem-solving" skills required for our future international competitiveness (e.g.; Bush, 1991; Committee for Economic Development, 1985; SCANS Report, 1991).

Regardless of the broader philosophical debate over the intellectual content of the school curriculum, we want to pursue here a more limited, albeit related, topic: rural school consolidation in America and the political economy that has helped bring it about. Though once the center of most social activities in many rural communities, public schools (and the ideas, values, and skills they convey to children) have become prime objects of state and national concern. Because our political, business, and educational leaders have increasingly embraced school reform on behalf of restoring international competitiveness (DeYoung, 1989; Spring, 1984), schools that would sooner use blackboards than computers, teachers who would concern themselves with ideas more than employment, and parents who prefer the happiness of their children over a good return upon "human capital" investments; all these are made to appear as willful primitives.

As we will attempt to show, however, school reform and school improvement are hardly stories about how to best structure learning opportunities for children. Rather, they are stories about the changing political economy of the United States. We argue that understanding the logic behind such "improvements" as school consolidation in rural America demands understanding how the state legitimates its goals and, more particularly, how those goals override other cultural and intellectual interests which might serve citizens equally well--if not better.

The following pages briefly interpret distinctive features of schools in rural communities, both historic and contemporary. Next, the discussion outlines three sociological and political economy perspectives essential for understanding why school consolidation (and rural school reform in general) are abiding themes rural America. Finally, we illustrate our case by examining the political and economic context of a vigorous new school consolidation program now underway in the state of West Virginia.

Distinctions Between School and Schooling

Rural school reformers in the U.S. have invariably failed to understand the distinction between school and schooling, which is one of the reasons that disputes so frequently erupt when administrators unveil plans to consolidate rural schools. Professional educators have seldom analyzed these terms, in part because the narrow discourse of reform traps sets another agenda and in part because the popular press keeps them on the defensive

by spreading rumors of their dereliction. The simple distinction between these two terms, however, reveals the key dilemma that concerns us in this article.

This distinction--between schools as important places in which people construct a social reality, and schooling as an attempt at systematic instruction of predetermined bodies of knowledge--is crucial. The Greek root of the term "school," schol, referred to contemplation, to the suspension of activity, and to leisure (Arendt, 1958). This hidden historical thread conjures the original intellectual space that schools provided. Schools, properly speaking, are places in which meaning is made by those present.

Schooling, on the other hand, implies pedagogy; a systematic technology for delivering instruction. The state employs practitioners of schooling primarily to apply the technology. The question for our purposes is this: for whose benefit does the school exist? And this is just our point with respect to professionals. Professional educators--like contemporary parents and children--are hedged in by rhetoric that incorporates them in a tool for purposes other than their own. They cease to be actors on their own behalf; instead they exhibit behavior that conforms to requirements imposed from without.

In fact, contemporary purposes put forward for schooling remove the potential for decisionmaking from virtually all those involved in schools, both rural and urban. A telling example appears in America 2000, the current administration's plan for

revitalizing schooling in America. In introducing the plan, the president of the United States put the issue this way:

> Until now, we've treated education like a manufacturing process, assuming that if the gauges seemed right, if we had good pay scales, the right pupil-teacher ratios, good students would just pop out of our schools. It's time to turn things around--to focus on students, to set standards for our schools--and let teachers and principals figure out how best to meet them [emphasis added]. (Bush, 1991, p. 4)

This passage reveals three relevant points. First, the imagined revolution constitutes a change in degree, not in kind; "we" who set the standards are just installing a new set of gauges. Second, the role of professional educators consists of accepting the standards and "figuring out" how to meet them. Third, and most telling in this passage, parents and children have no role--either in setting the standards or in figuring out of how to meet them. The New American Schools, it seems, will serve mostly as containers for the transfer of technology of schooling; and, in fact, America 2000 obscures the difference between schools and schooling that we have sought to illuminate.

The formally stated purpose--and actual development--of schools in urban (and suburban) America has usually been defined in the terms of schooling. Both the nineteenth century Common School movement and the early twentieth century secondary school movement responded to the perception that children in the cities had few satisfactory role models and no work-related communities to socialize them in any adequate way for the emerging industrial culture. Schooling would serve this purpose (Perkinson, 1991;

Tyack, 1974).

Although moderate support for community-based schools existed during the heyday of progressive education, the view that schools were sites for building democratic culture (e.g., Counts, 1971/1930) never achieved substantial influence. The conservative wing of progressive education convinced policymakers that city schools needed to be sites for instruction in basic skills, citizenship and vocational training; or, in our language, schooling (Cremin, 1961; Kliebard, 1986).

In the late twentieth century, the rhetoric of national improvement overlooks the distinction between schools and schooling; in fact, the national prerogative obscures the distinction. "Good schools" today are proclaimed primarily as ones where learner outcomes are high, and where good discipline and classroom order are the norms. Developing "human resources," then, is a dominant theme of not only city schools but, increasingly, of all schools.

Historical Views of Rural Schools and Schooling

Because they confound the technology of classroom instruction with "school," (i.e., confounding schooling with the school), most educators fail to understand their venue, either in historic accounts or in present reality. Again, this observation is not really an esoteric argument or a novel perspective. Recent interpretive studies of school cultures document how students use schools as important places for pursuing a variety of non-instructional (and often "oppositional") objectives within

the confines of school buildings (Woods, 1983; Willis, 1977; Everhart, 1983).

Historians, moreover, report that the elitism of secondary and university education repelled many Americans in previous centuries (e.g., Perkinson, 1991; Theobald, 1991). With some exceptions, ordinary citizens contested the alleged superiority of mental over manual labor inherent in late nineteenth century calls for secondary education, which did not, in any case--until well into this century--prepare native sons and daughters for a life on the land (Kliebard, 1986; Theobald, 1991).

In the great early nineteenth century intellectual debate between Jeffersonian and Jacksonian democrats, rural populations appear to have concurred with Jackson's views that common schools might be good because they leveled the social playing field. But they typically opposed the idea of using schools to develop and train political leaders, agreeing instead that physical labor and hard work could teach better lessons to would-be leaders than years of book study. In addition, cash-poor rural families often resisted statehouse pressures to raise local taxes for compulsory schooling (DeYoung, 1991; Theobald, 1991).

Despite resistance to taxes for schooling, and despite skepticism toward "too much book-learning," rural Americans in the nineteenth century valued schools as sites of all manner of community activities. In many places, community identity frequently constructed itself at the community schoolhouse (Fuller, 1982; Hartford, 1977; Tyack, 1974). Tyack summarizes

events frequently to be found in many nineteenth century rural schools:

> During the nineteenth century the country school belonged to the community in more than a legal sense: it was frequently the focus for people's lives outside the home....In one-room schools all over the nation ministers met their flocks, politicians caucused with the faithful, families gathered for Christmas parties and hoe-downs, the Grange held its baked-bean suppers, Lyceum lecturers spoke, itinerants introduced the wonders of the lantern-slide and the crank-up phonograph, and neighbors gathered to hear spelling bees and declamations....As one of the few social institutions which rural people encountered daily, the common school both reflected and shaped a sense of community. (1974, pp. 15-17)

The Rise of School Accountability

First-hand accounts of how "reform" actually came to rural schools are rare. All we have are the state documents that detail the codes to be followed in the countryside, and summary statistics like those previously cited (which show the effects). From our perspective, however, the reform of the particular places known as schools into sites for systematic instruction remains to this day the major theme of rural school history.

The conventional wisdom behind rural school reform was similar to that which had earlier guided reform in urban areas (Tyack, 1974). Reformers championed schooling as an activity best directed by specialized knowledge and administered by men who had mastered the twin disciplines of child development and "scientific" (i.e., efficient) management (Callahan, 1962). School superintendents became a dominant force by convincing state legislators and the public that they were the ones best

placed to interpret the emerging "breakthroughs" these disciplines announced at every turn (Tyack, 1974; Katz, 1971). Subsequently, the "scientific" and "professional" views of schooling pioneered by urban superintendents migrated into state departments of education, from which positions of authority they undercut many of the principles that had hitherto captured the interests of rural citizens.

Professionalizing public education statewide, for example, not only entailed formal training and certification for educators, it also meant that many of the voluntary contributions of parents or interested citizens to local schools had to be redefined and professionalized as well. Parents could no longer volunteer to bring lunches into school; they could no longer volunteer to sweep school floors; and they could hardly be allowed to sign-up to drive a school bus for field trips or after-school activities. Each of these duties increasingly became the purview of certified lunchroom workers, custodians, and bus drivers, respectively.

Eliminating "waste" in public education was attempted throughout this period via such strategies as standardizing school curricula and texts; fine-tuning instructional periods; grouping students based on mental and chronological ages; removing recess periods that interfered with classroom teaching; and even removing subjects from the curriculum if they appeared either too difficult to teach or could not be determined relevant to students' "probable destinies" (Kliebard, 1986).

Through quasi-scientific school surveys, district and state superintendents could determine the combined efficiency of organizational alternatives and instructional offerings. This work also enabled them to appeal to government officials for more school funding, since they could argue that they had eliminated waste (Tyack, 1974). This new technology of controlling waste meant, in the countryside, that one- and two-teacher schools had become too expensive. When state education agencies and legislatures began imposing building code standards, closing smaller and more isolated structures became inevitable and politically feasible.

Administrative science, moreover, took a clear view of another issue: Observing and evaluating efficient teaching practice in districts with many small rural schools posed an intolerable threat to efficient management. Rural America, claimed reform-mined school professionals, needed newer and bigger institutions, professionally administered wherever possible. Most rural country schools had none of these characteristics.

The Demise of Small Rural High Schools

Reformers imposed schooling on rural America via consolidation, and the number of rural one- and two-teacher schools declined by about 90% between 1910 and 1960. Consolidating rural high schools, on the other hand, was more difficult, as they were typically built later and, at the beginning, only in larger population centers. By the 1950s, most

rural high schools were comprehensive schools, comprehending both college and vocational (agricultural or industrial) preparation. In both rural and urban areas, however, establishing efficient bureaucratic control over comprehensive high schools was a primary objective for administrators (Callahan, 1962).

Yet, the fine balancing act that existing comprehensive high schools had managed through the 1950s in rural areas proved insufficient. These schools could not serve the national interest well, whatever pride their (backward) communities might (irrationally) take in them. Sputnik--in the depth of the Cold War--revealed to the nation that small high schools (most of which existed in rural areas) harbored a more serious kind of "waste" than any discovered in previous decades. These schools squandered talent that might otherwise secure the national interest; and no talent, in math and science, could be spared from development for the inevitable confrontation with the Soviet Union (Ravitch, 1983).

James Conant (1959), a retired Harvard chemistry professor and administrator, argued that only schools with a graduating class of at least 100 students could serve this purpose. He furthered opined that a drastic reduction in the number of small high schools was the only major structural reorganization of American education required to improve international competitiveness in the 1960s. That term, of course, would not become a commonplace idiom in American culture for several decades, but Conant's advice achieved wide influence, and the

subsequent decade--characterized by massive "national defense" highway construction and cheap fuel prices--saw the closure and consolidation of most small, rural high schools: once again in the name of avoiding waste and providing a technically better sort of schooling in the national interest.

Consolidation and Reform of Rural Schools: Political Economy Views

To this point we have attempted a quick historical discussion of the purported pedagogical whys and hows of school consolidation in America. For veterans of this debate, we have retold an old story with a few new twists. For newcomers to this literature, we hope we have summarized and referenced the most meaningful sources of further inquiry. Readers need to beware, however. We have given short shrift to the complex regional and historical differences among rural schools and rural school districts in the preceding summary.

Nevertheless, we have more ambitious hopes for this essay. Astute readers will already have recognized our underlying interpretation--that social, political, and economic circumstances provide more compelling explanations of school consolidation than the advertised curricular, pedagogical, or administrative benefits. We think that the latter ("technical") arguments--tiresomely repeated in the current round of school closings--actually serve to conceal the social, political, and economic agendas intended to change the behavior of the affected parties (communities, parents, and students).

Intentional concealment is all the more likely given recent empirical evidence discrediting substantial portions of the traditional "technical" arguments against small-scale schooling. Decades of research on appropriate school size fail to document anywhere near the benefits for large schools advertised during this century (Smith & DeYoung, 1988). Moreover, evidence that small schools actually blunt the negative effects of educational disadvantage (variously construed) on academic achievement continues to accumulate (Fowler & Walberg, 1991; Friedkin & Necochea, 1988; Howley, 1989; Huang & Howley, in press; Plecki, 1991). Ironically, small-scale schooling--in the form of "schools-within-schools" and "site-based management"--are touted in current national reform rhetoric as paths to professionalism and responsiveness (Murphy, 1991; Goodlad, 1984). Such "innovations" are made visible, of course, only because the comparative rarity of small schools make them seem novel.

Likewise, breakthroughs in distance learning (e.g., interactive computer networks, fiberoptic and satellite transmissions, audiographics, compressed video) ought to render school and class size issues increasingly moot with regard to curricular enhancement (Barker, 1991). Nevertheless, rural school closings continue throughout the nation. Finally, almost all jurisdictions that force consolidation subsequently fail even to document the improvements they allege to result from closings, let alone evaluate for them. For all these reasons, then, we conclude that political and ideological motives--not pedagogical

ones--account for rural school consolidation in the United States.

In the next several pages, we introduce three interpretations that help explain why consolidation figures so frequently as a policy for the perpetual reform of schooling in rural areas of the United States. The first of these may be partly recognizable, for it is interwoven with the "official" logic already sketched. Even so, the educational intent specified under <u>each</u> interpretation includes much more than the development of "human capital" that typically underlies school reorganization. Rather, each suggests that an ideology of economic development and social progress influences both the organization of schooling and the predetermined purposes of instruction.

All three theoretical views derive from social theorists interested in modern industrial development and the social and political structures that may facilitate it. Yet, while all three views acknowledge that economic reality affects (or determines) the nature of educational "innovations," they differ substantially over whether the evolving links between the economy, schools, and schooling are either desirable or inevitable.

<u>#1: Socialization and the "Modern" Division of Labor</u>

Most classical theories construe economic development as inherently benign. In fact, classical theories suggest that our very ability to envision social progress (via lenses supplied by

a functionalist social science) arises from the social progress made possible by capitalist development. This theoretical outlook represents the "structural-functionalism" formerly associated with mainstream "consensus" social theory (Durkheim, 1972; Collins, 1985). According to this view, occupational specialization and large-scale "rational" organization drive the process of modernization; modern roles and statuses developed are both impersonal and formal. Moreover, the process of becoming a modern nation results from transformed economic patterns; new patterns replace old, in a natural evolution from premodern to modern. Schooling, with its national instrumentalities, replaces school--once the site of provincial relations and roles (which decline under the pressure of modernization).

Consideration of the "natural" process of modernization occupied every major scholar with an interest in social change in this century:

> Differences between rural and urban communities have in one way or another preoccupied most well-known sociologists. Main's (1930) status and contract, Durkheim's (1947) mechanical and organic solidarity, Tönnie's (1940) Gemeinshaft and Gesellshaft, Becker's (1950) sacred and secular, all these and others reflect a common concern with an issue that has longed plagued sociologists--namely, what happens (and why) when a social order is transformed from one wherein most people reside in small villages and are committed to working the land from dawn to dusk, to one where the vast majority of inhabitants are urban-based and committed to a scientific-industrial way of life?
>
> (Sjoberg, 1964, p. 128)

Ferdinand Tönnies claimed that industrial development transformed the "natural" relationships visible in rural

communities (Gemeinshaft) into new and increasingly calculated interactions between individuals based on formal contracts and expertise (Gesellshaft). Emile Durkheim argued that under desirable conditions emerging industrial society replaced "mechanical solidarity"--social relationships based on the common experiences all individuals in most agricultural communities faced--with "organic solidarity." In a society increasingly moving toward organic solidarity, most individuals would not understand the occupational subcultures required in an industrial division of labor. On the other hand, they would enjoy a world of occupational diversity in which they would perform well, if such agencies as public schools carefully fostered symbolic commonality among children in diverse locations. According to Durkheim, schools in this circumstance ought no longer be considered a private affair; rather, the nation state, in its own best interest, ought to require to induct children into citizenship of the modern sort. Such schooling, under the auspices of the state, would substitute its teachings for the more particularistic teachings of families or churches in traditional communities.

Durkheim wrote extensively about the symbolic and cohesive possibilities of the school for building modern society, which he viewed as more progressive than many traditional societies (Durkheim, 1972). American sociologists Talcott Parsons (1961) and Robert Dreeben (1968) extended this functionalist interpretation of how and why public schools socialized children

to live in an impersonal and diffuse social world, oriented toward achievement and individual isolation.

Not everyone is convinced that this view is benign. Such noted contemporary scholars as E.F. Schumacher (1973), Wendell Berry (1989, 1990), and Christopher Lasch (1991) eloquently challenge the traditional association of well-being and progress.

Max Weber, too, contributed to our classical view of the instrumentalism schools would be asked to play as societies became more modern. Writing in a far more critical vein than Durkheim, he nevertheless foresaw a world in which occupational specialization based upon formal instruction would become a primary avenue into adult statuses, a development that would dramatically alter the form and content of education (Gerth & Mills, 1946).

Implications for consolidation. The several ideas outlined here have direct application to the question at hand. As social institutions, public schools have increasingly become the target of reform efforts tied to principles of technical rationality. Modern institutions become progressively more "complex" and, internally, entail the re-direction of provincial activity to goals consistent with building a national social and economic order in the modern world. Society, under this rationale, has an interest in reorganizing rural schools into bigger units concerned with producing students with the skills and values required for the pursuit of national goals and occupational possibilities. Indeed, according to this view, such purposes are

the only reasons why state and national governments would be in the business of supporting schools (reformed for schooling), anyway (Durkheim, 1972).

Citizenship, Economic Development, and the State

The main critique of what we here call the "citizenship" perspective argues that classical theory fails to account for or predict the rise in power of federal (and state) governments to intervene in the process of national economic development. But since at least the 1930s, national governments in the West have increasingly undertaken such interventions, for instance controlling monetary supply, manipulating interest rates, and regulating international trade (to name but a few).

Public education, under this interpretation, is indirectly managed by the state on the grounds that schooling represents an investment in the skills that promote economic growth. The state can increase this store of "human capital" by increasing the attention it gives to public education (not necessarily the same thing as increasing expenditures for education!). Further, the state legitimates schooling under this rationale; that is, it disestablishes competing aims--reflective engagement of the world, cultivation of the ethical life, celebration of the human spirit and of community endurance. These alternative aims lose a basis in official "right," so that schooling no longer entitles children to them; rather, the state now champions children as instruments of investment in the national economy (e.g. Schultz, 1981; DeYoung, 1989).

Thus, according to various sociologists of education, the argument--in both capitalist and socialist states--linking "improved" schooling and economic growth assume an ideological nature. That is, propagating the belief among the public that school completion is a prerequisite for employment (and thus, in a sense, for existence itself) has triggered a demand for increased educational opportunities far in excess of the number of individuals who can--in almost any nation--find appropriate employment (Collins, 1979; Rumberger, 1981; Boli & Ramirez, 1989). In the U.S., the various states spread this ideology as if it were certain to apply, simultaneously and equally well, to their own jurisdictions and to the national economy (Collins, 1979; e.g., West Virginia Roundtable, 1986). Official state documents seldom entertain the possibility that their own economic interests might not typically coincide with national economic interests.

John Boli and Francisco Ramirez present a particularly comprehensive view of the modern interrelationships between education, citizenship, and economic development. They suggest that contemporary educational policies and practice rely on several interrelated worldviews, all of which underlie increased expectations for schooling. Market-driven societies can exist, they argue, only if individuals (not families, communities, or other traditional groupings) comprise the primary social unit. Further, in order to help "create" socialized individuals, schooling must target children as the primary focus of public

educational investments. The school, in this view, becomes a state-controlled site for the creation of modern social individuals, economically oriented in the proper way, and all decisions about schooling must be based on the authority of the state (laws, regulations, and the prerogatives of policymaking). Naturally, under the regimen of modern schooling, moral teachings involving God and any traditions that give priority to place must decline, according to this view (Berry, 1990).

Boli and Ramirez argue that modern education is structurally organized into school systems primarily for children. Schooling is conducted on a free, egalitarian, compulsory, and rational basis by teachers who themselves are highly educated and value the product and the classroom organization that supplies the product. And finally, modern mass education attempts to create national (and international) cultural "legitimation." As Boli and Ramirez note, local communities are not focal points in the ideology of emerging society emphasized by modern education:

> The ideology supporting mass education [emphasizes] certain social utilities. Education provides a better work force to further economic development....Education creates good citizens; it makes people loyal members of the national polity....It creates a happier, more satisfied population, both as an end in itself, and for social and political stability....In short, education derives its legitimacy from its purported importance for reaching virtually all the goals of modern society. (1989, p. 18)

For Boli and Ramirez, the key ideological "trade-off" involved with schooling in all modern--or modernizing societies (i.e., virtually the entire world)--is that the state induces

individuals to abandon their identification with community, kin, or tribes and become national citizens. These "reformed" individuals (social units) come to believe that their personal depends on the state's policies for economic development and the success of national and international trade (seen to be a consequence of such policies). In accepting this bargain, citizens become entitled to schooling at public expense. Finally, having endured the process of formal schooling, citizens then believe that the credentials they acquire legitimate their entrance in the national workplace, a workplace controlled, in part, by the state itself.

Implications for consolidation. The theorists who offer this explanation for the dramatic rise of schooling in developing nations do not directly address the demise of rural schools in the U.S. Nonetheless, the implications of an ideological imperative that equates schooling, citizenship, and national economic development for the sorts of places we have been talking about are clear. Schools become sites for the exercise of the legitimated authority of the state, allegedly working in the best interests of all citizens. Allegiance to local communities, education in the service of interests other than the national imperative of economic expansionism--including intellectual development, cultivation of an ethical life, and all other functions that lack national utility--appear as merely sentimental anachronisms. Local communities, in this view, are not entitled to make decisions about the schools their children

attend. Schooling is the clear prerogative of the state.

#3 Public Education and the Crisis of the State

Under the rubric of classical theory, we reviewed economic development theories that suggest that changes in rural economies and rural social structures (including schools) come about as the result of the division of labor in modern societies. The second set of theories--those implicating the citizenship of individuals--stresses the role of the modern state in ensuring economic growth, largely at the expense of traditional social institutions and values (e.g., the importance of place, community, and kinship systems).

The theories considered next extend the analysis of the role of the state to include predictable periods of crisis. These crises compel the state to take extreme action in order to shore up the private sector, thereby further compromising social and organizational forms that do not usefully support the process of capital accumulation and economic expansion. From this perspective, the state is the site for mediating inequalities (class, race, gender), but it must also secure a productive economic system based on the progressive accumulation of wealth and, hence, on inequality (O'Conner, 1973; Carnoy & Levin, 1985).

According to this view, the state finds itself (and is in fact, by definition, formed) in an unsteady equilibrium, for its purpose is both to assuage and extend the cultural contradictions of capitalism (cf. Bell, 1976). On the one hand, modern states must ensure the profitability of the private sector in order to

stave off depression, economic collapse, and possible political and economic chaos. On the other hand, modern states also derive from, and espouse, the freedom, equity, and participation of workers and other groups. The dilemma of the modern state, therefore, consists of the need to conceal the inherent inequities and contradictions from those whom the political economy disenfranchises as a result of the accumulation of capital.

According to critical theorists who--among others--ascribe to this view, the key to understanding the role of the state in late capitalism involves disseminating and reinforcing among the public the belief that the only route to resolving the fundamental inequities plaguing modern political economies is more capitalist development. The unquestioned belief that continuous economic growth leads to social progress and individual happiness is the ideology underlying contemporary worldviews in capitalist societies, and promulgating this ideology as well as fashioning means whereby development can continue to occur are the primary functions of the state (McCarthy, 1972; O'Conner, 1973; Habermas, 1971).

Where this view differs from or extends the previous argument, for our purposes, is its specification of organized groups who, though they partly make up the state, nonetheless struggle to direct its undertakings. Whether such groups be workers, the elderly, environmentalists, racial or ethnic minorities, they continuously pressure the state to expand

opportunities or to provide special services not accessible to them on terms laid down by the private sector. Such entitlements always run the risk of hindering the accumulation of capital, since they typically involve either regulation or taxation that, under certain circumstances, can become harmful to the private sector.

Svi Shapiro (1990) overviews a number of perspectives on critical theory relevant to the state in modern capitalist nations:

> The state in capitalist society...is seen as a complex phenomenon, propelled by no simple or uniform purpose. Central to it, however, are two frequently contradictory ends: it must try to maintain or create conditions in which profitable capital accumulation is possible while, at the same time, trying to maintain or create the conditions for some minimum degree of social harmony. For, as James O'Connor notes, a state that openly uses its coercive force to help one class accumulate capital at the expense of other classes loses its legitimacy and hence undermines the basis of its loyalty and support. (p. 105)

During economic good times, public entitlements can be absorbed by the economy, and the state can take credit for improving social conditions, thus legitimating its contribution to economic and social progress (as in the second set of theories, above). However, during recessionary periods, the state faces a more difficult task of mediating between public demand and the imperative to accumulate capital. These times are identified as periods of "legitimation crisis."

The response to economic decline, social unrest, and increased skepticism of the state's handling of a deteriorating

economy is met, according to Habermas, by further extending state administrative control to one or more arenas of social life now, as the crisis unfolds, claimed to require better management toward productive ends (i.e., those that support the accumulation of capital):

> Rationalization (i.e., administrative planning) destroys the unquestioning character of validity claims that were previously taken for granted; it stirs up matters that were previously settled by the cultural tradition in an unproblematic way; and thus it furthers the politization of areas of life previously assigned to the private sphere. For example, educational (especially curriculum) planning, the planning of the health system, and family planning have the effect of publicizing and thematizing matters that were once culturally taken for granted. The end effect is a consciousness of the contingency, not only of the contents of tradition, but also of the techniques of tradition. And this development endangers the civil privatism essential to (a) depoliticized public realm. (McCarthy, cited in Shapiro, 1990, p. 108)

Implications for consolidation. We contend that understanding continued or renewed rationalization of education toward economic ends in the U.S. today stems from our contemporary economic crises, crises to which "modernized" citizens now turn to the state to help solve. In response, state and federal governments continue to press for changes in all public institutions, including schools. Such changes, according to the state, will better meet the (hypothetical) "needs" of the private sector. At the same time that the state exerts pressure for changing institutional objectives, it also champions cost savings. Thus common-sense notions of what schools are for or who should attend them become "publicized and thematicized" in

ways very much like those considered throughout this essay.

The relevance of this view for consolidation lies in the efforts of the state to (a) extend its control over a realm (small rural schools) previously discussed, (b) to appear to curtail expenses that the state, in crisis, can no longer afford, and (c) to tighten the perception of instrumental connection between schooling and economic prosperity.

As an example of how all three sorts of ideological pressures to reform rural schools can operate in some U.S. states, we next turn to a discussion of the "legitimation crises" in West Virginia. That state has the dubious honor of having mounted one of the most strenuous, and to this point, most successful recent attempts to consolidate its small rural schools.

The Case of West Virginia

Until the mid-nineteenth century, West Virginia, like much of the isolated North American interior, was a region involved in practicing European principles of land ownership, expanding small-scale agricultural production, and extending trade beyond local barter (Eller, 1982; Dunaway, 1989). And as late as 1870, the proportion of West Virginia students attending public schools matched that in "progressive" states like Massachusetts (Cremin, 1980), where the notion of schooling was pioneered.

By the early 1920s, however, dramatic changes in the political economy of the state had reformed the commonweal. Commercial logging, coal mining, and oil and gas drilling and

pumping established a national money economy among a population ill-equipped to engage in transactions with that economy on an equal footing. Industrial interests even secured property rights compromising those of local residents (e.g., Gaventa, 1980; Eller, 1982). Soon, whenever land changed hands, participants to the bargain confronted a hopelessly entangled separation of surface and mineral rights--a circumstance that legitimated subsequent, and continuing, spoilage associated with "extractive industries." The health of these enterprises became inextricably linked with "modernized" individuals' perceptions of their own prospects in the changed political economy of the state.

The state, moreover, had arguably not managed to keep up with the modernizing technical innovations overtaking urban schooling: scientific administration, sorting of children by grade (chronological and mental), high schools, industrial training, and social efficiency. Children in West Virginia were now attending school less frequently and completing less of it than students elsewhere. And it was about this time that the state picked up its national reputation for "backwardness," a burden it carries still (Shapiro, 1978).

One-room schools remained common in the state through the 1950s; roads adequate to carry buses could not be supported by a state apparatus that, among other woes, had lost control of its most obvious source of power (i.e., high demand for the natural resources needed for industrial development following the Civil War). To this day, West Virginia's schools remain smaller than

those in neighboring states, and transportation costs in rural counties remain very high (Meehan, 1987; West Virginians for Community Schools et al. v. Marockie et al., 1992).

Divide and conquer. West Virginia is the only completely Appalachian state--a fact suggesting that much of the landmass is riven with narrow hollows and divided by sharp ridges. Upkeep of roads exerts a perennial claim on state revenue, which perennially fails to meet the need. Hundreds of bridges and dams across the state fail to meet existing safety standards, according to local newspaper reports. Little seems to have changed since the early 1970s, when a major bridge across the Ohio River at Point Pleasant and a coal-mine refuse dam collapsed (e.g., Erikson, 1976). Hundreds lost their lives.

The poverty of the state, of course, arises from its having been dispossessed of the great wealth that national economic interests staked out for themselves early in the century. For example, Clay County--one of the "poorest" in the state--sits atop 1.9 billion tons of low-sulphur coal reserves. The nonresident entities that control the reserves pay trivial taxes. County residents recently petitioned the county commission to increase assessments of coal and timber lands--citing poor funding for schools, ambulance service, and road repair (Nyden, 1992). The problem, one citizen testified, is that most counties tax only active seams, whereas those in Clay County are inactive. This view presents but half the picture. Coal production is indeed taxed, but where coal production is greatest, the rates of

tax on production are lowest (data provided by the West Virginia Education Fund, January 1992). Similar circumstances apply in the timber industry. In McDowell County, none of the 155,000 acres of "managed timberland" (taxed at rates lower than other undeveloped property) belongs to individuals. In addition, throughout the state, much such land belongs to coal companies (Kabler, 1992; Eller, 1982).

Classification of property, determination of market value, establishment of assessment rates, presentation of issues to the electorate, and the administration of assessment and collection functions are obvious sources of local power. Understandably, these outcomes are tied to dominant interests, often those vested in extraction. In 1991, for instance, the total assessed value of all owner-occupied residential property in West Virginia was $2.9 billion; West Virginia's considerable coal reserves were assessed at only $612 million--less than 30 percent of the value of residential property (Farber, 1992).

Recent crises of legitimation. The 1980 national elections, results of which foretold a sea-change of attitudes toward social spending, probably set the stage for West Virginia's current woes (Meckley, 1986). Subsequent frenzy for school reform, however, carried less weight in West Virginia than in many other states, because the weight of history made provision of additional funds (as implied above) quite improbable. Although a $30 million tax reappraisal was conducted, the legislature postponed implementation, and finally modified the results beyond

recognition. The modified plan is being implemented over a ten-year period; and the modification has failed to remedy the worst abuses, low assessments of energy and timber reserves. According to Farber (1992), the abuses are as bad, and maybe worse than, they were ten years ago. But as the diluted property assessment plan began its ten-year journey into reality, matters were about to go from bad to worse.

Corruption charges against governor Arch Moore doubtless contributed to his defeat in the 1988 general election. Federal authorities had played their allotted part, however, vigorously pursuing both the governor and the corrupt legislative leadership right through the election. The state endured, and the new order proposed required reforms in short order.

The new governor--a prominent West Virginia CEO--proposed a grand objective: streamlining state operations to provide "better" services at less cost, exactly the strategy predicted by the theorists. The plan was to consolidate all departments under a (reduced) number of new heads, the so-called "Supersecretaries," trim the size of the state workforce (for example, by closing state mental hospitals), and, notably, improve the efficiency of schooling. The original strategy in this case was to bring education directly under the control of the new governor. The tactic was to consolidate education and the arts under a new Supersecretary for Education and the Arts.

Previous West Virginia governors had not employed full-time education advisers, relying instead on the State Board and the

Chief State School Officer to supply counsel on policy (Marshall, 1985). The proposed reform would have gone beyond advisement, however, and, incredibly, given the governor direct control of schools and schooling in the state. The change required a referendum, and suspicious citizens refused to cede control over education to the executive. The incumbent Supersecretary has since left office, not to be replaced.

As Marshall (1985) notes, even though not a direct political appointee, the West Virginia Chief State School Officer is still subject to political misfortune, simply because a successful Chief must coordinate action with the governor and legislature. A crisis of the magnitude that developed in 1988 indicated an impending change in Chiefs, therefore. The failure of the attempt to consolidate control of schooling under authority of the governor confirmed the need for change.

School consolidation and the crisis of legitimation. Shortly after the election, the old Chief resigned and was replaced (by the State Board of Education, itself appointed by the governor) with the successful superintendent of an urban district. Part of this person's credentials included consolidation of schools in and around Wheeling.

Unfortunately, the crisis grew worse as the new administration began to get organized. The state investment fund turned out to have lost over 275 million dollars through a combination of deception, mismanagement, and fraud. Managers of the fund resigned and escaped indictment for some reason. The

losers were, predictably, the county governments that had invested in the fund. At one point in the farce, the state apparently even tried to recoup its losses from the victimized counties.

In the meantime, economic conditions grew worse throughout the state. In April, 1991, for example the state for a time even considered billing county boards of education for an unexpected shortfall in receipts of the state-sponsored Public Employees Insurance Board. According to one report, the legislature had neglected to provide the county districts with funds to support a legislated premium hike (Kabler, 1991). Districts, put in the awkward position of choosing between paying teachers' salaries and paying for their insurance, threatened to sue. In rural districts, such unpleasant choices extend, for instance, to running buses or hiring teachers (Miller, 1991).

The need to streamline the operations of state government, then, was becoming ever more apparent, even as the new administration moved to check the crisis of legitimation. Schooling was such a large part of the problem because aid to education (95 percent of it direct aid to local districts) constituted over 50 percent of the state's nearly two-billion-dollar budget (Meckley, 1991).

The governor, legislative leadership, and new schools Chief were of one mind on strategy, however, as they interpreted the meaning of school improvement for the state. They all agreed that West Virginia's schools were too small, its teachers too

poorly paid and too numerous, and, worse still, the school-age population was in longterm decline (e.g., down from 359,000 in 1984 to 315,000 in 1991). Moreover, business groups were, in their view, correct in complaining that the state's children were inadequately prepared to meet the 21st century (e.g., West Virginia Roundtable, 1986; Governor's Committee on Education, 1990). Since 95 percent of the state's general revenue budget went to state aid to local schools, school "improvement" (principally consolidation) became the most obvious way to resolve the various crises besetting the state--the crisis of legitimation and the crisis of the budget. All that was required was to throw computers into the deal.

Subsequent action entailed both school consolidation and reductions-in-force. And the state made a massive commitment to purchase modern computer software. An illegal statewide teachers' strike in 1990, however, forced the governor into an agreement (premature from the viewpoint of his administration's strategy) to increase teacher salaries by $5,000 over three years.

The Governor's Committee on Education (1990) specifically tied consolidation and state finances, noting that the heaviest burden fell on the state. The fifth strategy touted by the Committee (1990, p. 20) is this sober observation: "We must put education finance on a firm and equitable basis." The statement captures the essence of the crisis, as predicted by the theorists. "Firmness" applies to saving money and reducing

services, which must somehow be reconciled with equity. In any case, the Committee posits the following connection with efforts to consolidate schools:

> Considerable sentiment exists across the state for taking a close look at our entire system of school finance. Such an examination would include, for example, the issue of budgeting and financial reporting process....Support for excess levies, bond issues, and consolidation will improve as a result.
>
> (1990, p. 20)

The sort of sentiment operating in that statement dotes on trimming waste and improving efficiency, not on pedagogy. It sets consolidation up as the inevitable conclusion of any fair-minded inspection of the state's responsibility for running schools--even though subsequent propaganda among local patrons of rural schools dwells on consolidation as a principal mechanism of better pedagogy.

The mechanism of consolidation. In the early days of the new governor's administration, the legislature--as part of a spate of "landmark" reforms in state government--created the West Virginia School Building Authority. The Authority was to fund capital improvements, a need felt most acutely in the state's rural areas, where 70 percent of the state's children attend school (Johnson, 1989), and where local capacity to carry capital debt had virtually disappeared during the 1980s (cf. Lewis, 1989). The Authority's statewide role was, of course, consistent with the state's larger role in funding (and reducing) operating costs. The activity of the Authority, however, has stirred considerable ire among rural residents, who recently filed suit

against the principal architects of the consolidation strategy (West Virginians for Community Schools v. Marockie, 1992).

The Authority disburses its funds on the basis of plans allegedly developed by local school boards with the participation of local residents. In fact, local boards (usually acting on behalf of the local superintendent) only rarely involve local residents. A more typical maneuver is to unveil plans for school closure at the eleventh hour, on the excuse that the state provided little lead time and that substantial funding rides on a quick response.

The chief criteria for gaining approval for such plans from the Authority are what the Authority terms "economies of scale." These criteria are simply mandated enrollment levels for elementary, middle, and secondary schools. State officials appear to believe that "economies of scale" inhere at whatever levels of size they have determined, regardless of geographic circumstances, kinds of students served, variations in technology, staffing, or the aims of education (presumed never to vary by community).

This view of economies of scale is much too naïve to serve as a legitimate basis for policymaking (cf. Penrose, 1959). In fact, it is a travesty of policy analysis. Apparently, an informed citizenry has realized this fact, as the recently filed suit indicates. The crisis of legitimation in West Virginia is not yet over; and it may not be over any time soon.

Conclusion: Why Consolidation Happens

Each of the three sorts of explanations we provide here better explains current manifestations of school consolidation policy than those usually provided by state departments of education. Moreover, those explanations that feature the active nature of the state in school reform policies--policies allegedly contributing to economic development--provide clearest insight, as compared with classical theories that take economic growth to be a "natural" phenomenon inevitably trailing social progress in its wake.

The preceding account also suggests that most economic development policies benefit a few vested interests, not citizens at large. Such policies implement decisions that submerge other possibilites that might enact the commonweal. In the current era, economic development has become an ideological component of our daily lives, and this ideology obfuscates and opposes many alternative social interests less clearly associated with economic growth and consumption and with the ceaseless imperative to accumulate capital.

Because of the power of this ideology--and of those who seek to disseminate it as "truth"--we must finally side with the perspective of political economy (the third view described above). It provides the most dynamic account of how and why the state continues to press consolidation so hard on rural communities.

Consolidation and the eclipse of community are related

features of contemporary economic development. In rural areas, consolidated schools may typically be "better" only in the sense that they serve as useful tools for national and international economic growth. But this growth simultaneously challenges the viability of local communities and "provides opportunities" for greater global inequality, more intense misuse of the land, more widespread pollution, and for degradations of many other sorts (Berry, 1990).

Increasingly, arrangements through which the state conducts its affairs--the interaction of politicians, bureaucrats, and special interest groups--lead policy in one direction or another. In the case of West Virginia, as in all U.S. states, the question is whether certain particular ideological interests championed by the state are successfully masqueraded as common sense by the state and thus become legitimated among the people, regardless of the direction in which their true interests may lie.

West Virginia citizens who have contacted us during their current educational crisis express bafflement, commitment to discover the "facts," and, finally outrage and determination to "act up" upon seeing the bogus "scientific" evidence the state uses to close many remaining small and rural schools. The progression from bafflement to determination, of course, takes time. At first, to the circumvented citizen, it seems only that the thinking of local school board members has somehow gone awry. As they read the (professional) literature about rural and small schools, however, they come to understand and question "the

facts." Then, because they understand that policymaking has ignored "the facts," they get angry, and they begin to understand the obscure basis of policymaking. They come to understand--as the critical theorists predict--that the domain of the state is contested ground, and that their schools are objects in the contest. This is the point at which they have organized for action.

Some observers may choose to think that consolidation (and specialization, differentiation, and the whole apparatus of divided labor) is "natural." We suggest that it is not: changes (such as school consolidation) are very carefully engineered. They reflect a consensus, to be sure, but they are not necessarily--or even usually--engineered with the consensus of the governed.

An unsympathetic editorial writer in a recent edition of the Charleston Gazette, exasperated at the resistance to consolidation exhibited by rural citizens, repeated the key themes of the governor's group (each point also a point in the theories considered above):

> I believe that the case of consolidation is overwhelming. Without it, West Virginia will continue to operate schools too small and too poor to teach classes that are mandatory if our kids are to keep up with the rest of the country....Consolidation has to come. Otherwise public education will bankrupt the state...Closing a school stirs primitive fears. Communities claim their existence is at stake [emphasis added].
>
> (Marsh, 1992, p. 6A)

Finally, pretenses to such objectivity do not always completely obscure the state's ulterior motives. A particularly telling example involved expansion of the membership of the School Building Authority. The Authority aims to close 245 schools by the year 2000, at the same time pumping $1.2 billion into new school construction. This is a sizable sum in a state beset by so many fiscal difficulties. The Authority, most conveniently, is composed only of the governor's appointees. Initially there were just six members. Sensitive, perhaps, to citizens' growing opposition to the strategy of consolidation, the governor decided to appoint an additional representative in 1991. The new representative--incredibly--came from the construction trades. Such representation can hardly claim objectivity as its base, no matter how shrewd a political move.

This episode suggests that the state's interest in schooling (in such particular events as consolidation) will often, perhaps always, present itself in guises other than "objective" improvement. This observation applies not only in rural West Virginia, but throughout our political economy. The economic and ideological stakes are substantial.

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